

SCREENING, ASSESSMENT, and FORMAL EVALUATION

Screening

The screening process is the preliminary step used to determine if sensory, behavioral, and developmental skills are progressing as expected, or if there are causes for concern or a perceived need for further evaluation. The screening itself does not determine a diagnosis or need for early intervention. However, it may suggest the need for an in-depth evaluation that can make those determinations. To ensure that children with special needs are identified early, screenings should be conducted within 30-45 days of any program's entry date. Screenings are not one-time events-if a child is suspected of having a developmental delay later in the program year, a referral is made for a formal evaluation at that time.

Assessment

Assessment is an ongoing process to determine a child's strengths and needs. It also assesses the family's strengths, needs, resources, concerns, and priorities. Information from the assessment is used to determine strategies to support the development of the child within the context of the classroom as well as his family, culture, and environment. Assessment is both a formal and informal process. The formal process includes the use of published developmental tests, checklists, or structured observational procedures. Informal assessment includes discussions with parents and caregivers and casual observation of children engaged in their daily tasks.

Formal Evaluation

A qualified professional performs an evaluation to diagnose a developmental, sensory, behavioral condition, or disability requiring intervention. Most children will not be referred for formal evaluations-only those children identified through the screening and ongoing assessment processes as suspected of having a condition or disability that might require intervention. The Early Intervention/Part C agency or the Local Education Agency (in Missouri, it's LICC or SICC) in the community must be notified of a child who needs formal evaluation to determine his or her eligibility for early intervention, special education, and/or related services as called for by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). When formal evaluation determines that a child does have a disability, programs work with families and local partners to develop and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individual Education Program (IEP) to address needs identified by the formal evaluation.